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Note verbale dated 16 September 2014 from the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the United Nations presents its compliments to the President of the General Assembly and, with reference to the candidature of Bangladesh to the Human Rights Council for the term 2015-2017, has the honour to forward herewith voluntary pledges of the Government of Bangladesh.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 16 September 2014 from the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the Secretariat of the General Assembly

Candidature of Bangladesh to the Human Rights Council, 2015-2017

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

1. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedom is deeply rooted in the history and society of Bangladesh. As a secular democracy, Bangladesh is firmly committed to the principle of a pluralistic society nurtured through genuine and constructive dialogue, and cooperation and mutual respect for one another. This conviction is embedded in the core values of its Constitution, which is based on the realization that development and the well-being of citizens can be guaranteed only through a culture of protection and promotion of human rights. The preamble of the Constitution invokes the core values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and pledges that it shall be a fundamental aim of the State to realize "a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social will be secured for all citizens".

2. Bangladesh considers all human rights as universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing. It also believes that constructive dialogue and cooperation among members of the United Nations form the basis for an effective tool for the promotion and protection of human rights. With this conviction, Bangladesh has been participating actively and constructively in the Human Rights Council. Bangladesh deeply values the work of the Human Rights Council and its working groups and mechanisms. Bangladesh is a firm advocate for continued strengthening of the United Nations, including the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, the treaty bodies and other human rights-related United Nations bodies.

Progresses and achievements in the area of human rights

3. The Constitution of Bangladesh is the supreme law of the country. The fundamental rights envisaged in the Constitution reflect many of the human rights prescribed by international human rights law. It provides for fundamental rights that guarantee, inter alia, equality before law and equal protection of law, protection of life and liberty and prohibition of discriminatory treatment. Specific liberties of speech and expression, thought and conscience, religion, movement, association and assembly, trade and occupation, property, security of home and privacy and respect for international law are also stipulated. Moreover, discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste or sex is prohibited. Although theoretically considered unenforceable, the Supreme Court has, on a number of occasions, upheld these fundamental principles in protecting the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the citizens.

4. The country is determined to fulfil its constitutional obligations and its international commitments for the promotion and protection of human rights through a wide range of legislative and administrative measures and socioeconomic development programmes. Bangladesh has strived to achieve to the extent possible

the goals stipulated in the voluntary pledges made previously. Some accomplishments at the national level are enumerated below:

- A number of institutional reforms have been undertaken in Bangladesh over the years to strengthen the rule of law and good governance. These actions and initiatives are aimed at further enhancing protection, promotion and effective enjoyment of human rights by all citizens and to allow free functioning of judiciary, media, civil society organizations and political parties. The most important among those is the separation of the judiciary branch from the executive branch to secure the legal framework for an independent judiciary. Bangladesh is convinced that independence of the judiciary is critical to ensuring good governance and rule of law and, by extension, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Bangladesh believes that an independent and impartial judiciary will have far-reaching implications in improving the rule of law and good governance in the country.

- A series of measures including speedy trial of criminal cases, prison reform, legal aid services and alternative dispute resolutions have contributed to strengthening the rule of law and good governance in Bangladesh.

- In order to address the challenges police face in promoting and protecting human rights while in the line of duty, a police reform programme has been in place. The objective of the programme is to enhance the capacity of the law enforcing agencies through supporting key areas of access to justice. In addition, legislative reform has remained under way to replace the colonial era laws by a law responding to a democratic society through incorporating provisions stipulating the code of conduct for police personnel with particular reference to upholding human rights in the discharge of their duties, gender guidelines for treatment of women and children, and punitive and accountable measures for violation of their legal obligations.

- Bangladesh has, through legislative and executive measures, ensured freedom of speech and expression, freedom of press and freedom of thought and conscience. Every citizen enjoys the right to religion, education, association, assembly, occupation, trade, etc. Bangladesh has one of the most independent print and electronic media in the world. Publications of some 544 daily newspapers, 357 weeklies, 62 fortnightlies and 93 monthlies bear the testimony of a vibrant print media of the country. There has also been a considerable growth of private television channels and radios. Nearly 30 private television channels are operating in the country, or are in the offing. The country also allows free access to all international television channels. Access to information has been greatly enhanced through widespread and unhindered Internet outlets.

- With the conviction that free flow of information is vital for any functioning democracy, the Right to Information Act has been enacted in the country and a full-fledged Information Commission remains currently in operation.

- Bangladesh has established itself as a democratic and pluralistic polity through its deep commitment to good governance, democracy, rule of law, and promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all citizens, with particular attention to women, children, minorities, disabled and other vulnerable sections of the population.

- Bangladesh has adopted appropriate legislative and institutional measures to promote the rights of women and children. The focus is on the protection of women and girls, in particular, from all forms of violence, abuse and discrimination. Bangladesh has a separate ministry devoted to the welfare of women and children. Stringent laws have been enacted to protect women and children, particularly girls, from being trafficked and abused. Stringent laws have been put in place to address violence against women.

- Gender mainstreaming is a major policy thrust in Bangladesh. Affirmative actions are taken to mainstream women in national development efforts through introducing gender sensitive budget, arranging literacy programmes, increasing representation in the workforce, ensuring economic emancipation and enhancing political representation. Some special provisions, including social safety net programmes, have been adopted for the economically disadvantaged groups, including women. A monthly allowance system for widowed, deserted and destitute women has been introduced. Distressed and ultra-poor women have been receiving food assistance and skills development training for income-generating activities. The forward-looking National Women Development Policy 2011 aims at addressing poverty reduction, with specific focus on women's empowerment and financial capacity-building. Bangladesh has also made significant strides in increasing women's participation in public life. Women are increasingly assuming leadership roles at the national level, in local government bodies and in the corporate sector.

- Bangladesh is one of the early signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The National Child Act, 2013, stipulates provisions that are in keeping with the Convention, including on the issue of the minimum age of a child. The National Children's Council is the highest policy-level body to monitor enforcement of child-related laws and rights. Due attention is being given to the issue of further strengthening and reforming the juvenile justice system.

- Bangladesh is the twentieth country to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the optional protocol thereto. The National Monitoring Committee, under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Welfare, is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Convention. There is an autonomous national body to provide services, including financial assistance, to persons with disabilities.

- Bangladesh has made significant progress towards economic emancipation of the people in terms of sustainable economic growth, increase of per capita income, better food security, enhanced disaster management capability and high achievements in social sectors, particularly in education and health sectors. Home-grown concepts have been critical enabling factors for these achievements. A vibrant civil society, including a large number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), continues to work in close partnership with the Government in bringing about the desired changes at the community level.

- Bangladesh is often cited for its best practices for social protection programmes. A wide range of safety nets have been put in place to address multi-dimensional challenges faced by the poor and the vulnerable. Some of

the flagship social protection programmes include direct cash transfer, food for work, free school feeding, old-age allowance and micro-financing support.

- Bangladesh encourages the contribution of civil society and NGOs in national socioeconomic development and in the promotion and protection of human rights. Government-NGO partnership is one of the hallmarks of Bangladesh's development scene. The NGO activities range from health care to non-formal education, women's empowerment and micro-credit programmes. NGOs and community-based organizations contribute significantly to the protection of civil and political rights, too. The number of registered NGOs in Bangladesh exceeds 14,000.

- Bangladesh believes that access to education is an essential step in the direction of enjoyment of human rights. The Government has, therefore, undertaken education for all, particularly girls' education, as a priority. The National Education Policy 2010 is a ground-breaking document that aims at promoting quality, transformative education for developing truly global citizens for a knowledge-based society. Education for girls up to twelfth grade is free in Bangladesh.

- Bangladesh continues to adhere to its commitment to the United Nations Convention against Corruption and work towards curbing corruption in all spheres of society. The Anti-Corruption Commission now enjoys full financial autonomy and functions as an independent, self-governed and neutral entity.

- Bangladesh has established the independent National Human Rights Commission in line with the Paris Principles. The Commission is invested with power to independently receive and investigate allegations of human rights violations from any individual or group. It also monitors the overall human rights situation in the country and makes appropriate recommendations.

- Bangladesh believes that terrorism adversely affects human rights. In line with its robust counter-terrorism credential, Bangladesh has ratified all 13 United Nations Conventions on terrorism. It is also a party to the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism.

Contribution at the global level

5. Bangladesh plays a constructive role in the international arena to promote and protect human rights through dialogue, understanding and cooperation. It strives to build consensus on important issues in different international forums, including at the United Nations. Some of its major undertakings at the international level are as follows:

- Bangladesh is a State party to almost all major international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the two optional protocols thereto; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the optional protocol thereto; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention for the Suppression of the Trafficking in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others; the Convention against Torture and

other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

- Bangladesh has always maintained sound working relations with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, the treaty bodies, the special procedures and other human rights mechanisms.
- With firm conviction that the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms can contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide, Bangladesh participates actively in its work. It is cooperating with other United Nations Member States, civil society representatives and special procedures in order to make the Human Rights Council an effective, efficient and credible human rights body. In recent years, it has invited several special rapporteurs demonstrating its willingness to cooperate with the United Nations human rights machinery.
- Bangladesh has cooperated with the human rights treaty bodies, and made good use of their recommendations in improving human rights situation in the country. Bangladesh has taken initiatives to further improve its record of treaty body reporting, and also to contribute to the work of the treaty bodies by nominating independent experts for election.
- Bangladesh has been advocating dialogue as the most effective means to promote religious harmony, tolerance, respect and solidarity among different faiths and cultures.
- Bangladesh is a lead contributor of troops for United Nations peacekeeping operations. Its soldiers are working in difficult circumstances in many post-conflict situations to protect the lives and human rights of civilians, particularly women and children.
- Bangladesh attaches very high importance to the universal periodic review mechanism. The mechanism has created a desired environment of openness and a platform for constructive dialogue. Bangladesh has been actively participating and cooperating with this mechanism. During its second cycle review, held in April 2013, Bangladesh had accepted almost all recommendations. Appropriate actions have already been initiated to implement these recommendations at the national level.

Voluntary pledges

6. Bangladesh makes the following pledges.

7. At the domestic level, Bangladesh will:

- Intensify its efforts, while framing its national policies and strategies, to uphold the fundamental principles enshrined in the Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international and regional human rights instruments to which it is a party
- Consider acceding to the remaining international and regional human rights instruments, including on the basis of consensus forged through national consultation processes, as appropriate

- Strengthen its efforts to meet its obligations under the treaty bodies relating to the international instruments to which it is a party
- Continue to enact national legislations to implement international human rights instruments to which it is a party
- Continue to cooperate and engage with the Special Procedures and mechanisms of the Human Rights Council, with a view to further improve its human rights situations and continue extending invitations to Special Rapporteurs on a regular basis
- Continue to engage in the universal periodic review mechanism to undergo the review under terms, conditions and modalities developed by the Council, and take appropriate measures at the national level to implement the universal periodic review recommendations, as accepted, involving all concerned stakeholders
- Work towards further strengthening and consolidating the legal and regulatory regime and institutional structures that promote good governance, democracy, human rights and the rule of law
- Continue to preserve the independence of the judiciary and freedom of the press
- Sustain the trend of further strengthening and empowering the statutory and watchdog bodies such as the National Human Rights Commission, the National Election Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Public Service Commission and the Information Commission
- Ensure effective parliamentary oversight, including through the parliamentary standing committees, and enhance the transparency and accountability of public accounts
- Continue to provide capacity-building and training programmes in the field of human rights to law enforcement officials, judges, public prosecutors, lawyers, journalists, civil servants, parliamentarians and the media
- Continue its developmental agenda for its people, with particular attention to empowerment of women, children, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable sections of the population, including through the continued application and innovation of home-grown concepts
- Work for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Plan of Action, and the outcomes of other major United Nations international conferences and their follow-up meetings
- Continue to promote and protect the rights of the religious and ethnic minorities and work towards maintaining the traditional communal harmony by upholding the secular, pluralist and inclusive values of the State and the society in general
- Continue to strengthen efforts to promote and protect the rights of workers and progressively realize decent work conditions across all sectors of the economy
- Further integrate poverty alleviation into its national policies and strengthen its efforts to ensure the provision of basic needs of its people, including food,

clothing, shelter, education, primary health care and access to water and sanitation, as means to effectively enjoy all human rights

- Promote the constructive role of civil society and print, electronic and social media in the promotion of human rights at all levels.

8. At the international levels, the Government of Bangladesh will:

- Continue to extend its fullest support to the Human Rights Council in its work for the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner
- Strengthen its constructive engagement and cooperation with other members of the Human Rights Council to make it an efficient and effective body
- Engage constructively with all parties, on the basis of dialogue and cooperation, to resolve challenges to the full realization of all human rights and to prevent human rights violations throughout the world
- Act as bridge builder among different groups and constituencies within the Human Rights Council in order to arrive at unbiased, objective and mutually acceptable decisions and understanding to promote and protect human rights throughout the world
- Continue to support the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in fulfilling its mandate
- Continue to support the United Nations agencies, programmes and funds that can facilitate the promotion of human rights such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Population Fund
- Promote realization of the right to development, as an inalienable right for all peoples and individuals, and support the ongoing efforts to further develop the concept and its operationalization, based on practical applications
- Continue to work for the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, emphasizing, the promotion of democracy, rule of law and good governance at all levels
- Continue to pursue the issue of human rights and climate change at national and international levels in order to further enhance the interface between the human rights and climate change communities
- Continue to promote and advocate for the rights and well-being of migrant workers across the entire migration cycle.

9. As a State party to all core international human rights instruments and one of the active players in the formulation of the international human rights agenda, Bangladesh presents its candidature for the membership of the Human Rights Council for the term 2015-2017.